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Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 51/20 of 19 November 1996.

II. Consultations and exchanges of information

2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States continued their practice of meetings and consultations. Cooperation between the two organizations and questions of interest to both concerning the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Somalia, Iraq and the situation in the Middle East were among those discussed.

3. During the period under review, the secretariats of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, as well as the Office of the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, continued to maintain close contact on matters of mutual concern to the two organizations. High-level contacts provided an impetus to the strengthening of relations between organizations of the United Nations system and the League. These included: the signing at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on 22 July 1996 of an agreement between UNESCO and the League of Arab States by the Director-General of UNESCO and the Secretary-General of the League concerning cooperation, within their spheres of competence, in matters relating to the occupied territories and the Palestinian people; meetings between the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Secretary-General of the League in September 1996 and March 1997, and with the Group of Arab States and the Office of the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations in October 1996.

III. Follow-up action on proposals agreed to at general meetings between organizations of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States

4. A summary of the reports of the organizations of the United Nations system on their cooperation with the League of Arab States during the period under review is given below. It represents the follow-up action on proposals adopted at the meetings held between the United Nations and the League at Geneva in 1993 (see A/48/468/Add.1) and at Vienna in 1995 (see A/50/496).

A. United Nations Secretariat

1. Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis

5. The former Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis (now part of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs) continued its cooperation with the League of Arab States in the fields of population and statistics. In the statistical sector, the Department provided its support for the implementation of a project focusing on the Arab Maternal and Child Health Survey which is one of the main activities of the Pan-Arab Project for Child Development (PAPCHILD)

6. In the field of population, the Department assisted in a project focusing on the strengthening of research activities of the Population Research Unit of the League. This project has created self-reliance in countries members of the League in the collection, analysis and utilization of demographic data for socio-economic development plans and programmes, and has improved the understanding of such issues as the status and role of women, and the impact of environment in the population and development processes in Arab countries. It has also developed the population information system for improving coordination and cooperation among countries members of the League.

2. Department of Public Information

7. The adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 51/20 on cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States received emphasis in the press release service (English and French) of the Department of Public Information and was also covered in its print and radio products on 19 November 1996.

8. A seven-minute Arabic segment of the radio magazine "Al-Majailatu Al-Natika" (No. 10/96) was devoted exclusively to the question of cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States. In the programme, representatives of various Member States, and in particular the former Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, described cooperation with the United Nations in the areas of social and economic development and underlined the need to strengthen it further.

B. Economic Commission for Africa

9. As part of its direct relations with a specialized agency of the League of Arab States, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) continued, in the period 1995-1996, its cooperation with the Documentation and Information Centre of the League (ALDOC) in the field of information technology. Accordingly, ALDOC and the Development Information Services Division of ECA have had an extensive exchange of data and information. Furthermore, ALDOC assisted ECA in the development of the North African Development Information System and the Arab Information Network.

10. In the view of ECA, there exists a vast potential for cooperation between its secretariat and that of the League. This potential could be realized in the event of the establishment of formal relations between the two institutions, as it will be possible to maintain close liaison, exchange information, hold regular consultations, define areas of cooperation and undertake joint activities.

C. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

11. During the period under review, the programme of work of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) included different aspects aimed at harmonizing, strengthening and intensifying cooperation with the League of Arab States. Contacts were maintained with the League and its specialized agencies, involving the preparation of reports and reciprocal participation in meetings.

12. In the field of population, ESCWA coordinated activities with the League, the Arab Demographic Centre and the International Union of Scientific Studies on Population in the preparations for the first Arab Regional Conference held at Cairo in December 1996, and presented a paper on gender statistics.

13. The Commission cooperated with the League in the organization of a joint expert group meeting on border crossing formalities and agreements for the transport of goods and passengers, and on a port pricing structure for Arab ports.

14. In the agricultural sector, ESCWA participated in the workshop organized by the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development on the impact of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade on Agriculture, held at Amman in May 1996, and took part in the twenty-first session of the Statistical Committee of the League in November 1996.

15. In the area of environment, ESCWA prepared a report on the regional implementation of Agenda 21 and submitted it to the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment at its eighteenth session, held at Cairo in November 1996.

16. Pursuant to the Arab Regional Conference on Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Amman in September 1996, ESCWA adopted three core areas of activity: women and poverty, women and decision-making, and the Arab family. The Ministers of Social Affairs requested the League to cooperate with ESCWA in the preparation of a programme for follow-up action.

17. The Commission also cooperated with the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in the publication of a regional directory on sources of industrial information in the Arab countries. Furthermore, ESCWA provided an outline for discussion with AIDMO on activities proposed for joint implementation.

D. United Nations Children's Fund

18. Cooperation between the League of Arab States and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been expanding steadily since 1995, to include an emphasis on the rights of children, including support to the process of reporting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, studies on the implementation of the Convention in Arab countries, and an analysis of the reports being made to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Collaboration has continued in the monitoring of goals for children, particularly in health and education, and in advocacy for children. The Fund supports the activities of the Childhood Department of the League of Arab States in these areas.

19. Periodic joint meetings have continued to monitor progress on the Arab Plan for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, adopted in November 1992. This included a review in May 1996 of achievements made in the Arab countries towards the mid-decade goals for children. To further this process, a technical committee comprised of the League of Arab States, a regional non-governmental organization, the Arab Council on Childhood and Development and UNICEF, met annually. The Committee has enabled the coordination of activities and has established priority areas for collaboration.

20. The League of Arab States and UNICEF have continued their close collaboration in data collection and analysis with regard to Arab children. The Fund has contributed, on average, 25 per cent of the external funding for each country survey under the PAPCHILD project.

21. In the educational sector, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) and the Middle East and North Africa Regional Office of UNICEF worked jointly in implementing the Education for All initiative, especially with regard to increasing school enrolment of girls.

22. The Fund continued its joint activities with the Arab States Broadcasting Union, including capacity-building on child-related issues, and the distribution of a co-produced radio magazine series on child rights and women's issues and goals for children. The League of Arab States has declared the first Monday of each October as the Day of the Arab Child. The League participated actively in the regional consultations sponsored by UNICEF on children and armed conflict.

E. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

23. In the course of 1996 and 1997, fruitful consultations took place between the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the League headquarters, as well as the Office of the Permanent Observer for the League at Geneva.

24. At the request of the League and the Organization of African Unity, UNCTAD sent a mission to Nouakchott in January 1997 to assist both organizations and the Government of Mauritania in organizing a workshop for the participants in the second Afro-Arab Business Week.

25. In response to General Assembly resolution 51/20, the UNCTAD secretariat, during the period under review, intensified consultations with the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States on a number of issues related to the Palestinian economy.

26. In this connection, extensive consultations were held with the General Secretariat of the League regarding the comprehensive study under way at UNCTAD on the Palestinian economy in the context of regional cooperation.

27. With regard to promoting regional and subregional cooperation in trade, the emphasis has been primarily placed on prospects for the expansion of trade and economic relations between the Palestinian territories, Egypt and Jordan with possibilities of subsequently including other countries of the region. A project proposal on the subject was discussed in a meeting held between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNCTAD. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Arab countries and of the League of Arab States. The project proposal was endorsed and subsequently submitted to UNDP for funding through its regional funding facility.

28. In 1997, discussions took place regarding potential cooperation between the League and UNCTAD in the following technical areas: transport, customs and trade facilitation; banking and insurance; new financial services; micro-enterprise services; enterprise competitiveness (trade points and trade efficiency assessment); trade-related legal issues; and human resource development.

29. In May 1997, at the request of the League, UNCTAD made a presentation of its Automated System of Customs Data Entry, Control and Management, with a view to creating awareness of the benefits of the System in reforming customs procedures and management.

F. United Nations Development Programme

30. The cooperation between UNDP and the League of Arab States and its specialized agencies continues to focus on several areas of mutual interest. The areas of cooperation can be summarized as follows:

(a) *Exchange of information*. The Regional Bureau for Arab States of UNDP exchanges information with the League on UNDP initiatives and mandates through briefing sessions provided to ambassadors of the League accredited to the United Nations.

(b) *Participation in programme activities*. The League and its agencies participated in the intergovernmental meetings which discussed regional programmes and projects, round-table meetings and several thematic seminars, workshops and conferences, such as the

Expert Meeting on Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Livelihoods in the Arab Region, held at Damascus from 22 to 24 February 1996, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)/UNDP Symposium on Sustainable Growth in the Arab States, held at Sana'a on 8 and 9 June 1997;

(c) *Direct support to the League of Arab States.* Support was provided by UNDP for the establishment of a modern and sophisticated documentation and information centre for the League, in collaboration with UNESCO. It also provided assistance to the secretariat of the League in administrative and managerial development, which strengthened its organizational structure.

31. The Regional Bureau for Arab States was invited to participate in the work of the League's Joint Committee on Environment and Development for Arab States. Accordingly, the Bureau designated the UNDP Cairo Office as the focal point and representative to the Joint Committee.

32. The League of Arab States and some of its specialized and associated agencies continued to execute, as well as share the cost of, projects with UNDP. The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) has been by far the main source of cost-sharing for UNDP-sponsored projects aimed at establishing regional software technology centres, the Centre for Environment and Development in the Arab States and Europe (CEDARE), and at increasing the productivity of barley, pastures and sheep in the critical rainfall zones. Cooperation also continues with the Arab Organization for Agriculture Development, the Arab Monetary Fund and the Regional Organization for the Conservation of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

33. In order to enhance and systemize cooperation between the two organizations, the League of Arab States and UNDP are in the process of finalizing a cooperation agreement which provides for regular consultations on issues of concern to the Arab region. It is expected that the cooperation agreement will be signed by both parties in 1997.

34. With regard to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, the UNDP Office to Combat Desertification and Drought has developed various approaches to address the innovative provisions of the Convention, such as participatory approaches, the establishment of national desertification funds and the concept development of the national action programme process as an interactive, decentralized planning tool. In this context, the Office offers technical assistance for the launching of national action programmes, as called for under articles 9 and 10 of the Convention.

G. United Nations Environment Programme

35. In the framework of the long-standing cooperation between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the League of Arab States, specifically the Technical Secretariat of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment, and under a project financed by UNEP to support the implementation of the Arab programmes for sustainable development, several activities were undertaken in the Arab region with the participation of concerned Arab, regional and international organizations.

36. In the area of combating desertification, the activities included: the convening of workshops on green belts; a study on the state of desertification in the Arab region and ways and means to deal with it; and a study on green belt projects in North Africa, Badyat El Sham and the Arab Peninsula. A manual of institutions and experts in the field of combating desertification was also prepared.

37. In the area of conservation of biological diversity, an Expert Group Meeting on Biodiversity in the Arab World was held at Cairo in October 1995.

38. In the field of controlling industrial pollution and the promotion of cleaner production technologies, a book of guidelines for the identification of the environmental impact of industries in the Arab region was prepared and printed in 1995. Furthermore, case studies were initiated to encourage the use of the guidelines. A training workshop on the environmental impact assessment of industries was also held.

H. United Nations Population Fund

39. Over the past few years, cooperation between United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the League of Arab States has focused on two main areas: the implementation of the programmes of action of the international conferences that are relevant to population and development; and strengthening regional and local capabilities to support the formulation and analysis of population and development policies through the design and implementation of related research activities and the dissemination and utilization of their findings.

40. In a follow-up to the implementation of the recommendations of relevant international conferences and forums, UNFPA and the League jointly sponsored and participated in a number of regional conferences, including the Regional Meeting of Experts and Ministers of Social Affairs on the Follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action, held at Amman in September 1996. The meeting called for action to ensure access to quality reproductive health care and to enhance job opportunities and training for women. It also endorsed a recommendation to support the Family and Women's Affairs Unit of the League of Arab States.

41. The League of Arab States also participated in a number of meetings, supported by UNFPA and organized by ESCWA, held in the region during the past year. Among these was the meeting of the Heads of National Population Councils and Committees in the Arab World which addressed important population and development themes, such as the effects of economic adjustment programmes on population, and population variables and poverty.

42. With co-sponsorship from UNFPA, the League of Arab States, the Arab Gulf Programme for the United Nations Development Organization (AGFUND), UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and with technical input from the United Nations, the regional Pan-Arab project on Child Development, with its component the Maternal and Child Health Survey, was continued through 1996 and 1997. In collaboration with the League, UNFPA convened an expert group meeting in April 1996 to review the reproductive health module prepared by PAPCHILD. This module is now being applied in a survey in Morocco. Other areas of inter-agency collaboration have resulted in the sponsoring of a complementary husband module to the 1997 Demographic and Health Survey in Jordan.

43. The Pan-Arab Project for Child Development has been a model for inter-agency partnership in the region and has generated a regional database characterized by comparability through standardized methodologies. In some countries, the indicators generated on maternal and child health and family planning are the only current data available in the country, for example, in Lebanon. The Project continues to generate data that are used for the development and evaluation of population policies and programmes throughout the region.

44. Since 1993, UNFPA has been involved in strengthening the capabilities of the Population Research Unit. Currently, UNFPA is conducting an independent evaluation of the capabilities of the Unit, as well as the degree to which the UNFPA-supported project has achieved its stated objectives. The evaluation will also make recommendations on how to improve this capacity further.

45. The cooperation between UNFPA and the League has so far been very fruitful. Strengthening this cooperation at an institutional level by involving all the relevant departments and units within the League will enhance and optimize the ability of Governments to implement population and development policies and programmes.

I. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

46. Significant progress was achieved in cooperation between the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the League of Arab States during the period under review. The period was characterized by an intensification of contacts between UNRWA and the League, and a strengthening of their relationship in support of a continuation of UNRWA humanitarian activities.

47. The Agency maintained contact with the secretariat of the League at Cairo and with the Permanent Observer for the League in New York, participated in regular sectoral meetings organized by the League, and sought to foster exchanges between its officials and the secretariat of the League at various levels and in various forums.

48. The Agency and the League continued their cooperation in the educational sector. Together with UNESCO, UNRWA and the League co-sponsored a seminar on support and development of Palestinian education and the educational process for the children of Palestine, held at Cairo in June 1996. The Seminar examined Palestinian educational needs and means to support and develop the education of Palestinian children in a variety of areas, *inter alia*, noting the distinguished role played by UNRWA in that regard. The sixth annual joint meeting between UNRWA and the League Council on Education for the Children of Palestine was held at Cairo in December 1996. The meeting reviewed educational services offered to Palestine refugees in the host countries, and issues facing the UNRWA educational programme.

49. The critical financial situation and the role of the Agency in the present context were the subject of considerable discussion in various forums of the League. Support for UNRWA humanitarian activities; concern over the regular budget deficits faced by the Agency and their implications for the Palestine refugees and the host authorities; rejection of any reduction in or cessation of

UNRWA services in any of its five fields of operation; the necessity of its continuing to provide services until the Palestine refugee problem was resolved; and appeals for increased contributions to UNRWA, including by member States of the League, were the themes reiterated on a number of occasions by various organs of the League, including at meetings of the Council of Ministers (in September 1996 and March 1997), the Conference of Supervisors of Palestinian Affairs in the Arab Host Countries (in January 1997) and the Council on Education for the Children of Palestine (in December 1996).

50. Within that context, UNRWA continued to benefit from the League's ongoing generous support for its programmes and its continuing efforts to urge donors to increase voluntary contributions to the Agency's regular budget. In 1996, member States of the League contributed US$ 7.3 million to the Agency, mainly to its special assistance programmes but also to its regular budget. In September 1996, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA wrote to the Secretary-General of the League advising him of the Agency's continuing financial crisis and its implications, and reiterating the Agency's earlier request that Arab donor States increase their contributions to the Agency's regular budget to the level of US$ 10 million, collectively, in 1996. In addition to the numerous appeals made by the League for additional contributions to UNRWA, mentioned above, the League Council of Ministers, at its meeting in March 1997, reaffirmed League Council resolution 4645 of 6 April 1997, in which the Council called upon member States of the League to increase their contributions to the 1981 level of 7.73 per cent of the Agency's regular budget.

51. At the invitation of the secretariat of the League, UNRWA participated in a special joint meeting with representatives of the Arab host countries and the secretariat, which was held at Cairo in March 1997, to discuss the conditions of Palestine refugees in the area of operations. Among the issues considered at the meeting, which had been called for by the League Conference of Supervisors of Palestinian Affairs in the Arab Host Countries, were relations between the Agency and the Arab host countries, the Agency's critical financial situation, austerity measures introduced by the Agency owing to funding shortfalls, and distribution of funding under the Agency's peace implementation programme. The report of the joint meeting was noted by the League Council of Ministers at its March 1997 meeting.

J. United Nations Centre for Human Settlements

52. During the period under review, the cooperation of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) (UNCHS) with the League of Arab States and its member States focused on the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held at Istanbul in June 1996, and specifically, on the preparations for it. The third Arab Regional Preparatory Meeting for Habitat II was held at Rabat, in September 1995, followed by the Dubai International Conference on Best Practices for the Urban Environment, hosted by the Municipality of Dubai, United Arab Emirates. In line with the discussions at the coordination meeting held between the United Nations and the League of Arab States at Vienna in July 1995, UNCHS provided technical support for the elaboration of urban and housing indicators in eight member States of the League as part of the preparation of their respective national plans of action submitted to the Habitat II, as well as to guide post-Conference national policy and local action in the housing and urban development fields.

53. Further, UNCHS and the League of Arab States sought to intensify cooperation through reciprocal representation at each other's major meetings. The Centre participated in the fourteenth session of Council of Arab Ministers for Housing and Reconstruction in November 1996; a resolution was subsequently adopted by the same body on the upgrading of the UNCHS regional information office at Amman to a fully fledged regional office for the Arab States. Following upon this initiative, the Commission on Human Settlements, at its sixteenth session, held at Nairobi in May 1997, called upon the Executive Director of UNCHS to prepare a comprehensive report on the issues concerning the upgrading, in full consultation with the League of Arab States and the host country.

K. International Labour Organization

54. The International Labour Organization (ILO) maintained close cooperation with the League of Arab States and, in particular, with its specialized agency, the Arab Labour Organization (ALO), through the conduct of joint activities and coordination of action related to issues of common interest.

55. The ILO and League of Arab States Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region continued its activities in the exchange of information, especially in the field of occupational safety and health.

56. The ILO/ALO joint Seminar on Community-based Vocational Rehabilitation, which had been postponed from the previous biennium, was conducted in May 1996. Moreover, ILO and ALO held a joint committee meeting early in 1996 to establish the programme of joint activities for the biennium 1996-1997 and agreed to organize, during the biennium, eight seminars at the regional and country levels, in the fields of vocational rehabilitation, vocational training, the development of employment offices, women's equality of treatment and opportunity, labour statistics and adaptation to economic and social change.

57. One of the seminars, on the role of employers' and workers' organizations in occupational safety and health, was conducted in December 1996. The two organizations completed preparations for the other seminars which were scheduled to be held during 1997.

58. Furthermore, ILO provided technical and financial assistance to the Regional Arab Programme for Labour Administration, which is now managed by ALO. The two institutions also collaborated in the implementation of the ILO/UNDP regional programme on the support of Arab migration policies, which was completed in March 1997.

L. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

59. Cooperation has continued between UNESCO and the League of Arab States in the fields of education, culture, sciences and social and human sciences. In the field of education, a seminar on support and development for Palestinian education and the educational process of the youth of Palestine was held at the headquarters of the League at Cairo, from 1 to 2 June 1996.

60. In the field of culture, a number of activities in the Arab region have been undertaken within the framework of the World Decade for Cultural Development and, in particular, in the field of cultural tourism. In that respect, UNESCO organized a seminar with 100 participants on culture, tourism, development, which was held at Sana'a from 17 to 19 September 1996. It also participated in a meeting organized by the League at Cairo in November 1996, concerning the action of the League for the preservation of the Old City of Jerusalem. On this occasion, UNESCO presented its programme for the preservation of the monuments of Jerusalem, which is being financed from extrabudgetary resources.

61. In the field of science, several activities and joint projects have been undertaken with ALECSO and the UNESCO Cairo Office, including: a workshop on agricultural applications of genetic engineering, held in Tunisia from 20 to 29 June 1996; a workshop on biodiversity in the Arab region, held at Beirut from 7 to 10 October 1996; and a regional workshop on Arab networking of biosphere reserves in the Arab region, held at Damascus from 2 to 5 December 1996.

M. World Bank

62. Traditionally, the World Bank has made available to the League of Arab States its global experience on human agenda issues of mutual concern. The Bank's resident mission at Cairo in particular has the lead in maintaining ties with representatives of the League and ensuring the sharing of information.

63. At the general meeting held at Geneva, the World Bank affirmed its intention to continue its cooperation with other United Nations and League institutions and to further support their efforts in the fields of poverty alleviation, education and human development, health and water resource management.

N. International Telecommunication Union

64. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Regional Office for the Arab States and the technical secretariat of the Council of Arab Telecommunication Ministers of the League of Arab States continued their cooperation during the past year by means of the following: (a) exchange of information; (b) coordination of regional seminars and training courses; and (c) preparation of a cooperation agreement between the League and ITU. A draft coordination agreement, based on existing agreements between ITU and some regional organizations, was proposed by the League of Arab States and is currently under study by the ITU Legal Section.

O. World Meteorological Organization

65. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has collaborated with the League of Arab States in the context of the existing working arrangements in the fields of meteorology and operational hydrology. This collaboration has been specifically carried out through the Permanent Meteorological Committee of the League.

66. The working arrangements of WMO with the League and some of its bodies have resulted in fruitful projects which are being successfully implemented for the benefit of the Arab countries. Recently, WMO has been engaged in promoting the management of water resources in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea by means of the Mediterranean Hydrological Cycle Observing System (MED-HYCOS) which is a part of a worldwide initiative, the World Hydrological Cycle Observing System.

67. Within the framework of UNDP and trust fund agreements, technical assistance projects for the development of national meteorological and hydrological services, including manpower development, are being implemented in a number of Arab States.

68. Moreover, the WMO Regional Meteorological Training Centres in Algeria and Egypt continue to play a vital role in the development of human resources in the Arab States. Through the WMO Voluntary Cooperation Programme and regular budget, additional training in specialized fields, equipment, and expert and consultant services have been provided to a number of Arab States.

P. International Fund for Agricultural Development

69. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has continued to provide financial support to the specialized agencies of the League of Arab States in order to support various activities in the fields of agricultural research and training. The Fund has recently approved a technical assistance grant to finance a regional programme for technical backstopping of IFAD projects in the Near East region. In addition, another grant was approved in December 1996 for the control of the date palm red weevil, stem borer and grubs by entomopathogenic nematodes in the Arabian Peninsula.

70. The Fund participated in a subregional consultation for Western Asia on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, which took place at Damascus, from 9 to 11 April 1997. The meeting was organized by the Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe and the Convention secretariat. The Consultation sought to achieve effective implementation of the Convention, to further cooperation and to coordinate the sharing of experience in the preparation of National Action Plans in the region.

71. The Fund has also collaborated with the financial institutions of the League. The Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development remains the major financier for most projects funded by IFAD in the Arab region.

Q. International Maritime Organization

72. Pursuant to the agreement of cooperation between the two organizations, the League is represented regularly at the meetings of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), including those of the IMO Council and Assembly.

73. In addition, IMO has implemented from time to time projects involving member States of both IMO and the League. Within the context of its integrated technical cooperation programme, IMO has assisted national training institutions and supplemented their capacity-building with projects at the regional and subregional levels.

R. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

74. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the League of Arab States have been pursuing efforts to strengthen their cooperation and coordination, primarily in areas relating to refugees and more generally in relation to global humanitarian issues of common interest. A draft cooperation agreement is being finalized and will be submitted to both organizations for final approval.

75. During 1996, contacts and consultations continued between the League and UNHCR to identify the most appropriate solutions to critical refugee situations in the Arab region. Cooperation between the two organizations involved other concerned parties and permitted the resolution of complex problems in a coordinated manner.

S. United Nations Industrial Development Organization

76. During the period under review, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has continued to maintain close cooperation with the League of Arab States and its specialized organizations. Of special relevance was the cooperation with the Arab regional

organizations concerned with industrial development, in particular the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization but also with other organizations, such as the Arab Iron and Steel Union, the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting, the Arab Union for Cement and Building Materials and the General Union for Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture for the Arab Countries.

IV. General meeting on cooperation between the secretariats of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States and its specialized organizations

77. As recommended by the General Assembly in resolution 51/20, the general meeting on cooperation between the representatives of the secretariats of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States and its specialized organizations took place at Geneva, from 2 to 4 July 1997.

78. Representatives of the following bodies of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States participated in the meeting:

(a) *United Nations system*. United Nations Secretariat (Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Department of Political Affairs and its Centre for Disarmament Affairs, Department of Public Information), UNCTAD, UNCHS, UNEP, UNHCR, ESCWA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), ILO, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNESCO, WHO, World Bank, ITU, WMO, IFAD, UNIDO and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA);

(b) *League of Arab States*. League of Arab States secretariat, Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), Arab Academy for Science and Technology (AAST), Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), Arab Labour Organization (ALO), Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID), Arab Atomic Energy Agency (AAEA), Council of Arab Ministers of Interior (CAMI), Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD), Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization (AIDMO), Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Agencies (AGFUND).

79. The Meeting was co-chaired by the Under-Secretary-General, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, and the Assistant Secretary-General for International Political Affairs of the League of Arab States. They represented the respective Secretaries-General of the two organizations.

80. The meeting undertook an assessment of the cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States. It noted with appreciation the determination of both organizations to strengthen further the existing cooperation by developing specific proposals in the areas of collaboration. Its participants recognized the importance of continued cooperation between the two organizations, with a view to contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security and to promoting social and economic development.

81. The United Nations and the League of Arab States reiterated their firm commitment to cooperate and coordinate their efforts to promote peace and security in accordance with the objectives, principles and provisions of the Charter of the United Nations.

82. The United Nations took note of the efforts deployed by the League of Arab States to solve regional disputes and ease tensions in the Middle East, such as in Somalia, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Algeria. In the recent past, when joint United Nations and League of Arab States political engagements took place — in Somalia in 1994-1995 and in Yemen in 1994 — both organizations benefited from coordinated action.

83. In this regard, the meeting acknowledged that those efforts are consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. The meeting also agreed that both the United Nations and the League of Arab States should, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, further investigate ways and means to assist the development and enhancement of the League's capabilities in the areas of preventive diplomacy and peacemaking, taking into consideration the present efforts of the League to evolve suitable mechanisms for the resolution of regional conflict.

84. The meeting recognized the need for enhanced consultation between the secretariats of the two organizations, in particular for the purpose of strengthening their capacity to act in the areas of early warning, preventive action and peacemaking, as stipulated in the Agenda for Peace. The United Nations and the League of Arab States agreed that permanent contacts and consultations between the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the Department of International Political

Affairs of the General Secretariat of the League could improve awareness of intentions and activities undertaken by both organizations. In this context, the United Nations Secretariat has designated the West Asia Division in the Department of Political Affairs as the contact point for cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States. The General Secretariat of the League has appointed the Division of International Organizations to serve as the focal point in its contacts with the Department of Political Affairs.

85. The meeting decided that consultations between the two political departments would take place regularly, not only at the departmental level but also between subdivisions, units and desk officers. The meeting encouraged enhancement of the flow of substantive information and documentation between the Secretariats.

86. The meeting acknowledged with satisfaction a number of important steps undertaken by the League and its member States in the field of disarmament. The meeting stressed the importance of, and encouraged, further determined efforts by all member States with regard to the international comprehensive approach towards the issue of disarmament in the Middle East.

87. The meeting stressed that the universality of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and all international disarmament-related agreements is both a moral obligation and a necessity for the maintenance of international peace and security.

88. The United Nations and the League of Arab States expressed their concern over the continuing problem of landmines and other unexploded devices that are causing serious human suffering and which have negative social and economic effects on mine-infested countries over an extended period. Although the progress achieved so far to solve the problem of landmines is welcomed, additional efforts should be dedicated towards achieving more rapid and substantive progress.

89. The meeting welcomed the Brussels Declaration which confirmed the need for international cooperation and assistance in the field of mine clearance in affected countries. The extension of financial and technical assistance to these countries in order to assist them in resolving the problem in the shortest possible time is encouraged and supported.

90. The United Nations and the League of Arab States welcomed the progress made in the Ottawa process and urged the vigorous pursuit of an effective, legally binding international agreement to ban the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines.

91. The League of Arab States also underlined the necessity of establishing a binding agreement that should include a special provision to secure the extension of financial and technical assistance to mine-infested countries in order to enable them to get rid of this problem in the shortest possible time.

92. The meeting took note that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the League of Arab States both saw it as their role to work with Governments to help to further improve the framework for refugee protection in the Middle East in order to allow for effective and humanitarian management of a constantly changing refugee situation in the region. The goal in this joint effort is to maintain high standards and to ensure that precedent-setting approaches set the right example for programmes in the entire region in dealing with refugees and displaced persons. In this regard, both organizations agreed on the necessity of giving added attention and assistance to UNRWA, with a view to improving the living and health conditions of the Palestinians.

93. Having undertaken a thorough review of the progress achieved since the 1995 meeting at Vienna and having stated that the lack of financial resources constituted an impediment to the implementation of a number of joint projects, the agencies and programmes of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States and its institutions agreed to further consolidate and strengthen cooperation in the following areas: environment; agricultural and rural development; combating desertification; population and health, including reproductive health and family planning; refugees; human settlements; labour; education, science and culture; information; prevention of crime and abuse of drugs; training and research; industry; energy; transport; telecommunications; and trade.

94. In particular, the meeting took note of the progress achieved by the Pan-Arab Maternal and Child Health (PAPCHILD) surveys being implemented in cooperation with UNFPA, the League of Arab States, AGFUND, UNICEF, WHO and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, and considered it to be a model for inter-agency partnership in the region. The meeting also supported the continuation of this project in its future phase, the Pan-Arab Family Health Survey.

95. The meeting encouraged the strengthening of direct bilateral ties between counterpart United Nations and League of Arab States institutions within the overall framework of cooperation established by periodic general meetings.

96. In accordance with the decision of the General Assembly that inter-agency sectoral meetings should be organized on a regular basis on areas of priority to the development of Arab States, the United Nations and the League of Arab States agreed to hold a meeting on international trade and development at the League's headquarters at Cairo, in 1998.

97. The items on the agenda of the general meeting were considered by working groups composed of representatives of the departments, organizations and agencies concerned. Proposals and recommendations emanating from the discussions, as well as those contained in the working papers, were incorporated in the final document adopted by the general meeting at its closing session. The final document was transmitted by the United Nations Secretariat to all the participating agencies and organizations of the United Nations system and to the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States in August 1997.